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THE AMERICAN SOLDIER AS HE IS.

BY A. HENRY SAVAGE LANDOR.

AMERICANS have heard a great deal of abuse—principally from inaccurate fireside critics—about their soldiers and officers in the Philippines, about the cruelty of the latter towards the natives, and many other misdeeds; court-martialings of officers have been frequent and their publicity increased by excessive big-drum beating. Perhaps a few frank remarks on the American soldiers from one who is neither an American citizen nor a military man, but who has had exceptional opportunities of observing the American soldier, both in active service and in time of peace, may not be unwelcome to unprejudiced people.

To put it mildly, one might almost feel inclined to state at the outset that most accusations brought against the American soldier are “absolute nonsense”: the other few “almost nonsense.” There have been cases, of course, where American soldiers have actually—but generally under severe provocation—lost their heads and behaved in an inhuman way; but these cases, when the facts are impartially sifted down, are but few and far apart. It is all very easy for people who sit at home—thousands of miles from where the bullets fly—to grow hysterical over this and over that, and to condemn those who, at the risk of their lives, endure hardships in the service of their country; but it should ever be borne in mind that the most humane war can but at best be a revoltingly cruel occurrence, during which, despite the kindest intentions in the world, infinite destruction, pain and torture are bound to be caused to innumerable people on all sides.

I am in no way defending those who have actually been guilty, for no one abhors more than myself the very idea of inflicting pain on any living thing, whether man or beast. I think, indeed, that no punishment can be severe enough for those who un-

necessarily subject the enemy to any kind of torture under any consideration whatever, and I most certainly condemn the "water cure" and such infamous methods of procedure—which, unfortunately, have been resorted to in a few cases—even when the enemy himself may have been indulging in similar ways. If the boast is made of importing a perfected civilization, retaliation is, to my mind, not best effected by descending to the low modes of barbarians. Above all, let us give savages a noble and good example. In the case of American officers and soldiers in the Philippines, as far as I could ascertain, the proven instances of unnecessary cruelty towards natives were but a very exaggerated few. It seems, therefore, a pity that the names of many brave and innocent officers have been mercilessly dragged in the mire, either through the spite or jealousy of others or on meagre and untrustworthy testimony of interested parties. There is to my mind no more demoralizing influence for a soldier of any country than unfair and unmerited accusations brought against him by ungrateful fellow citizens. Again I repeat, if cruelties have occurred, punish to the utmost the actual offenders, but by no means be unjust and drag in as well those—the majority—who have done and are doing excellent work and faithfully serving their country.

I have had the honor of meeting a great number of American officers, both during the Chinese war and in various parts of the Philippine Archipelago, and I was in most cases struck by the morally magnificent type of men who lead the American army—fair, open-minded, businesslike, hard-working officers, combining patience in tedious plodding through excessive office-work, with pluck and dash and, above all, tact and accurate judgment when in the field. It is not to be regretted that the American officer lacks the overwhelming love for wearing-apparel which characterizes military men of many European armies, and his simplicity of clothing is, indeed, well matched by his easy, manly, sensible manner. There is no superfluity of gold braiding, no idiotic monocle deforming one section of the face and impeding the sight, no exaggerated sword dangling noisily upon the ground, no swagger worth noticing; but when it comes to doing the actual work of a warrior, although it is accomplished with no show and no pomp, it is done well, very well.

Such men as those who hail from West Point have, of course,

acquired polish of manner, and are, in a way, possibly superior, owing to the perfect military training they have undergone; but one cannot help being impressed in the American army by the remarkable, natural, gentlemanly manner even of those many officers who have risen from the ranks. This is particularly noticeable to any one who is familiar with a similar class of men in European armies, and is due, I think, mostly to the fact that, taken personally, the American soldier is vastly the superior of the two in intelligence, and, although often but self-taught, he is ever so much better educated than the average soldier of other countries. Hence his facility in rising again with ease to a social grade which, in enlisting as a soldier, he had but temporarily discarded. In most European armies, the officers who rise from the ranks are comparatively few, as few men of the better classes have the moral courage of the American to descend in order to make at all costs a fresh start in life; also because conventionalities and red-tape make it somewhat difficult and, anyhow, unpleasant for such men to get on at all in the army, their career being generally hindered and hampered in every possible way, if not officially, at least in private life, by brother officers who began life in luckier circumstances. In England, for instance, although matters are gradually becoming better, the ablest of young officers with no private means of their own would find it very up-hill work to keep pace with the extravagant social habits of their brother officers, and any attempt to diverge from antiquated social rules would not be looked upon with favor, as we unfortunately had occasion to hear not very long ago.

The modest way in which I saw American army officers live in the Philippines could not but be admired. The regimental mess was generally of the simplest description, absolutely devoid of even the remotest suspicion of luxury; in fact, in many of the messes one had to sit on empty packing-cases, as chairs were scarce, if there were any at all; while such articles as silver plate upon the table were luxuries not even dreamt of. The food was of the most humble kind, and perhaps in this line national sentiment often took the place of climatic precautions. Bacon played an important part in the diet, with abundant helpings of Boston beans and liquefied canned tomatoes, with some occasional but often unrecognizable pie to follow, the whole washed down with boiled water. So that no accusation can be brought against

the American officer for luxurious living. Many, it is true, suffered from dysentery or other internal troubles in a more or less marked degree, but yet all seemed happy enough and one seldom heard a grumble.

Perhaps one word of admiration is also due to those plucky and faithful ladies, the wives of American officers, who not only follow their husbands to outlandish countries, but brave by their side the dangers of a tropical climate, far away from all the most cherished minor pleasures of feminine taste. They were, indeed, a ray of sunshine in the otherwise monotonous social existence of some of the more remote camps in the Philippines, and with the incessant thoughtful charm and unconventional brightness so typical of American ladies they were indeed a boon to their lucky husbands, as well as the respected idols of the entire camp. A tropical climate such as that of the Philippines is most disastrous to the looks and the general health of white ladies; but these self-sacrificing American women, strong-willed and ever alive to their duties, endured it all with a courage which one could not but thoroughly appreciate.

Barring occasional jealousies, which are but human, it was always a very great pleasure to me to notice how cordial, almost brotherly, American officers were to one another when off duty, regardless of social standing or rank. After all, whether a man is a general or a lieutenant, it should not be forgotten that a human being is a human being. The custom of the American officer in this respect should certainly serve as an example to officers of other nations, who, I think, would benefit much by it, as well as the interests of their respective countries.

The American officer in the Philippines is in many of the more inaccessible posts often overworked to an unnecessary degree. I have known of one officer who filled no less than fourteen different posts, and, considering the amount of paper-work which is demanded of American officers, it is not surprising that that officer, after some years of strain, broke down. It was, nevertheless, most interesting to note how, under the stress of circumstances, an American officer, besides being a splendid soldier, can be switched on to do outside work of the most varied kinds. Some of the most practical Provincial Civil Governors I had the pleasure of meeting in the Philippines were detailed from among army officers; and, indeed, on going about, one had to come to

the conclusion that army officers could turn their hand, and generally successfully, to almost anything. Several of the Government Bureaus in Manila were in charge of army men, and such matters as temporarily running farms and schools seemed to make a pleasant change in the usual routine of daily military work.

Let us come to the private soldier and examine him as a man. If you can discard the blunt manner (which is mostly assumed to show his independence), and the profusion of swear-words (which seem to come somewhat more naturally) interspersing his conversation, there is something very nice about the American soldier. He is intelligently simple in his ways, ever full of resource, quick and shrewd, unboundedly good-natured, and possibly he is, of the soldiers of various nationalities who have come under my observation, the most humane of all. Yes, indeed; behind a roughness of speech which is almost startling, a heart of gold is to be found in most American soldiers. I have seen men in the field, on more than one occasion, whom, from outward appearances, one would put down as perfect brutes, gentle and considerate—almost as gentle as women—towards wounded comrades or fallen enemies.

The American soldier has a blunt code of honor of his own, devoid of conventionalities, but with some sound gentlemanly principles in it.

Non-American military critics pound a great deal on the fact that the American soldier is undisciplined as compared with European soldiers of several nations—the German, for instance, the most perfectly drilled soldier in the world; but, as I have had occasion to point out elsewhere, the finest “parade soldier” does not always make the best soldier in the field, and to my mind discipline carried out to an inordinate extent is detrimental rather than otherwise in producing an efficient fighter. With the perfected weapons one possesses nowadays, it is more the development, not the suppression, of individual intelligence that counts in gaining victories. Perhaps the Chinese war afforded the best lesson, as the soldiers of all nations were to be seen fighting side by side.

Comparisons are always odious, but I remember making one at the time, in a book called “China and the Allies,” between the American and German soldiers when marching through

the Forbidden City in Pekin the day we entered it. I wrote then:

"The American soldiers were most enthusiastically cheered by the Allies, and they deserved it, for, indeed, they had done excellent work in the campaign. On this particular occasion, when one could contrast and compare them with other nationalities, one was specially struck by the individually intelligent appearance of the men and by the matter-of-fact mien of the line officers. They presented quite as good a military appearance as soldiers of any other nation. The German contingent came next. Splendid men, tall, heavy, machinelike, and all so exactly alike in height, build and shape that they seemed made in the same mould. The contrast between them and the natural, easy-going Americans was great, their extraordinary parade march—as unnatural a way of locomotion as was ever invented—causing much merriment among less perfectly drilled soldiers of other nations."

I further observed:

"The American soldier is the type, with some slight improvement, of the soldier of the future. He is a general and a tactician in himself. He possesses a great deal of dash and courage, much unconscious perception and natural intelligence. He did wonders in the Chinese campaign, and were he to possess a stronger physique and a healthier constitution, both of which he does much towards ruining, he would decidedly be the best soldier in the world."

Having since seen much of the American soldier in the Philippines, I am prepared not only to repeat that statement but to add that, with the many sensible improvements which have of late been adopted in the American army, for fighting purposes the American soldier is as perfect as he can be made under existing circumstances. There remains, of course, the matter of his health and endurance, both of which, I think, are gradually improving, but which may yet be made infinitely better. It is a pity—a very great pity—that the American soldier drinks more copiously than wisely; but that, again, is one of the great scourges of over-civilized countries, and for this, more than the soldier himself, are to be blamed that lot of solicitous people at home who cannot differentiate between rules which read well on paper and those which do actual good. If drink in moderation were permitted or tolerated, or at least controlled, as it used formerly to be, by the military authorities, much poisoning of soldiers by liquor clandestinely obtained could be avoided. Once the temptation of doing that which is forbidden were removed, I think a

good deal might be accomplished in reforming the soldier on that line, which is his weakest. Drinking in moderation, and with some judgment as to what one drinks, I do not suppose, hurts anybody to any serious extent; but the misdirected efforts of well-meaning people at home to superintend the morals of soldiers is tantalizing to the latter in an extreme degree, and often leads to results diametrically opposed to those expected.

Barring the drinking, the American soldier is no more immoral than the average civilian one meets—in fact, a great deal less—because his work in itself is not conducive to a life of leisure.

Really, when one takes the trouble to examine the average type of American soldier, it is rather interesting to note what a well-behaved, honorable man he is. He ever combines with all his fighting instincts, which are developed to an intense degree, a remarkably good business head and an eye to improving himself in the world. Many a discharged soldier I met in the Philippines had forfeited his free passage back to the States in order to start farming or trading; and a number, I was glad to see, were quite successful in their efforts. Others, the more reckless, those who wished to make a fortune in a week, but did not, had taken to mining; but these, with few exceptions, were less desirable. Then again, others had started bookstores, shops, saloons, anything at which money was to be made.

Contrary to what many people believe, the American soldier is not generally disliked by the natives in the Philippines. Taking things all round, I think the average native has a great respect for the American soldier, and, certainly, in a more intensified degree, for the American officer. This does not mean that misunderstandings, either from private quarrels or other personal causes, do not occasionally arise, and the innocent frequently suffer for the guilty. But it is always well to differentiate between the sentiment towards individuals and the sentiment towards the men as soldiers. On the other hand, it is to be regretted that the average American regards every native in the Philippines as a sort of traitor, a suspicion which the natives with their strongly developed natural insight feel most keenly. When the Americans and the natives learn to trust one another more frankly and implicitly, I believe what little friction there may be between them now in the Philippines will be altogether removed.

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